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SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: MINOR DEMONSTRATIONS PROTEST  
LATEST GAZA VIOLENCE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Costa Rican reaction to the recent violence in Gaza was limited to small demonstrations in front of the Israeli embassy (on January 9) and the U.S. Chancery (on January 20). Although the fighting drew heavy (and mostly anti-Israeli) coverage in the local media, the NGO and MFA reactions were more muted (and more even-handed). The small, but well-amplified protest on Inauguration Day struck us as an attempt to find new relevance by a nearly-defunct splinter party and the local Palestinian community. The two demonstrations were in keeping with the Tico tendency to protest domestic developments (e.g., CAFTA) more vigorously than international events, but they highlight the extent of the concern about the IDF incursion into Gaza, even in out-of-the-way Costa Rica. END SUMMARY.

LITTLE, LATE AND LOUD  
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¶2. (U) On January 20, a group of approximately 50 people peacefully parked themselves in front of Embassy San Jose to protest the (by then ended) violence in Gaza. The RSO had been notified by host country security services and all appropriate measures were in place, albeit unnecessary for the small and peaceful event. The organizers, the Solidarity Committee with the People of Palestine, appeared to have had obtained permission to demonstrate.

¶3. (U) The group remained in front of the Embassy for nearly two hours in the late afternoon, at times giving speeches over a loud speaker system and chanting in support of Palestine and against Israel. The protestors seemed a little confused; they criticized both the (by then out of office) Bush and incoming Obama administrations. The mellow participants waved flags of the PLO and the virtually-defunct Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT) of Costa Rica; a few faded anti-CAFTA stickers were in evidence as well.

¶4. (U) The protest followed a larger (and more timely) gathering in front of the Israeli embassy in downtown San Jose on January 9. On that date, over 200 people gathered to burn the Israeli flag, paint graffiti on nearby buildings, wave placards and call for a "free Palestine." The protestors also called on President Arias to break diplomatic relations with Israel. Unlike the small event in front of the U.S. Embassy, the event on January 9 drew some media coverage.

HR COMMISSION, MFA ISSUE STATEMENTS  
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¶5. (U) Although the latest round of Gaza fighting drew

heavy (and mostly anti-Israeli) coverage in the local media, the NGO and MFA reactions were more muted (and more even-handed). The Costa Rican International Human Rights Commission, for example, issued a statement on January 8 expressing "profound concern" about the violence, and in particular about the "grave humanitarian impact" on the people of Gaza. The Commission called for both sides to end hostilities, for humanitarian assistance to flow again immediately, and for a return to dialogue and the search for a peaceful solution.

¶6. (U) The Commission's statement followed (and echoed) the MFA's release of January 5, which similarly called for an immediate end to the hostilities, blamed both sides for the violence, insisted on the immediate resumption of international humanitarian assistance, insisted also on a return to dialogue, and called for "quick and decisive" action by the UNSC (as a Council member). The MFA's statement (the only official GOCR reaction to the violence) concluded that Israeli-Palestinian peace would only come from a political, two-state solution. (Full text emailed to WHA/CEN.)

COMMENT

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¶7. (SBU) The well-amplified protest on Inauguration Day struck us as an attempt to find new relevance by a nearly-defunct splinter party and a few members of the very small Palestinian community here. This second event seemed almost an afterthought to the "main"

protest, which targeted the Israeli embassy earlier, but even that was not significant. Both demonstrations were in keeping with the Tico tendency to protest domestic developments (e.g., CAFTA) more vigorously than international events, but they highlight the extent of the concern about the IDF incursion into Gaza, even here in out-of-the-way Costa Rica. We were pleased the MFA statement struck a balanced tone. Given Costa Rica's recognition of Palestine in 2008 (and the regional Palestinian ambassador - the Permrep in New York - visiting to present his credentials on January 19), we half-expected more criticism of Israel.

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